



**STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF EARLY LEARNING**

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Dear Early Learning Leaders,

Like everyone else in the country engaged in early learning, the Department of Early Learning is abuzz with the exciting news of the \$500M Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) competitive grant process for early learning. I wanted to take this opportunity to reach out to you and let you know what DEL is doing to prepare for the application, and to ask for your help, support, and feedback as we move forward.

Race to the Top provides Washington with a phenomenal opportunity to move forward with many components of [Washington's Early Learning Plan](#). It will be a competitive grant application, and we believe that Washington State is in a very strong position to compete for these funds. We have as many questions as answers right now, but are busy organizing and trying to learn as much as we can. We will keep you in the loop as we move forward.

Progress to Date

2011 has been an exciting year for young children in Washington resulting in significant progress with our 10-year Early Learning Plan. Despite horrific budget cuts in the legislative session, early learning funding was largely protected, demonstrating broad support for our work. It also shows that our State Legislature understands that funding early learning is a critical investment that will save state money in the long term by investing in our children. Highlights from 2011 include:

Home Visiting Programs - Washington state is moving forward with scaling home visiting programs through the Home Visiting Services Account (HVSA) led by Thrive by Five Washington. Including funds allocated by the State Legislature, the federal government, and private funds, Thrive expects that the HVSA will reach \$6.4M over the biennium.

Full-Day Kindergarten – The Legislature increased the number of students eligible for state-funded full-day kindergarten from 20% to 22% of our kindergarten enrollment.

WaKIDS –The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) was designated the kindergarten transition process for all state-funded full-day kindergarten classes, which includes over 15,000 children in the highest-poverty schools statewide. WaKIDS is voluntary during school year 2011-12, and mandatory for school year 2012-13.

ECEAP—An additional 165 ECEAP slots were funded with federal Child Care and Development Fund Dollars.

Just last week, the National Council of State Legislatures released an [Early Care and Education State Budget Actions FY 2011](#), detailing a state-by-state funding picture for early learning. Washington was one of 22 states that showed increased funding for early learning, and only three states showed greater increases than Washington's 22.9% increase.

An Opportunity to Move Forward

In January of this year, the Joint Resolution Partners announced the top 11 priority strategies for implementation in 2011 (see inset). These priorities come directly from the Washington State Early Learning Plan that many of you participated in developing. We are predicting that more than half of these early learning priorities can be directly addressed in the Race to the Top application.

While it will not solve all of our needs and wishes, this federal grant would provide us with the opportunity to build and strengthen our current work, and if we are successful, it will establish the foundation for many of our other priorities in the future.

Process

The RTT-ELC application will not be released until July. Clear timelines have not been issued, but we expect there will be an abbreviated timeline to complete the application. This means that we will likely not be able to conduct as much community outreach as we would like. Therefore, we are working to frontload the process, before the application is released, to hear from our partners and generate thoughts and ideas about this plan. This includes:

Formal group meetings: We will be meeting with groups such as the Early Learning Advisory Council, Quality Education Council, Home Visiting Advisory Group, Early Learning Action Alliance, and others to discuss the development of the application.

Small group meetings: We are setting up small discussion groups to discuss key areas that we anticipate will be major parts of the application including QRIS, Home Visiting, P-3, and professional development and training.

Outreach: We will be reaching out to individuals to seek feedback and solicit their involvement over the next several weeks.

Email: We are soliciting feedback at RTT-ELC@del.wa.gov. We know that it's difficult to provide feedback on an application that has not been released, but we hope you will send us your thoughts so that we may integrate them into the application development process.

Website: We will post all updates to our RTT-ELC web page: www.del.wa.gov/government/racetotop/.

What's Next?

Because we have so little information, we are working to become prepared in advance. We will keep you apprised of information as we learn more, and hope that you will contact us with any information that can assist us to produce the most competitive proposal on behalf of our state's youngest learners. Please remember to check our website for the latest updates: www.del.wa.gov/government/racetotop/.

This is an exciting time, and we appreciate your support, patience, and feedback as we prepare a responsive, strategic, and competitive proposal that builds on all of our work together.


Sincerely,




Elizabeth M. Hyde, Ph.D.
Director

2011 Partnership Priority Strategies

1. Make Home Visiting Available to At-Risk Families
2. Increase Use of Early Literacy Services and Programs
3. Expand and Enhance ECEAP
4. Deepen Parenting, Caregiver and Early Learning Professional Knowledge and Learning Opportunities
5. Implement Quality Rating and Improvement System
6. Align Prekindergarten and K-3 Instructional & Programmatic Practices
7. Implement Kindergarten Readiness Assessment
8. Continue Implementation of Phased-In Full-Day Kindergarten
9. Revise and Promote Use of Early Learning and Development Benchmarks
10. Build Statewide Infrastructure for Partnerships and Mobilization
11. Expand P-20 Longitudinal Data System

 Strong alignment with predicted RTT-ELC application guidelines

 Moderate alignment with predicted RTT-ELC application guidelines